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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - ALMATY NOTES, MARCH 24 - APRIL 7, 2008

11. The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana.

- Azat Statement Prompted by Aliyev's Conviction
- OSDP Says Government-Opposition Dialogue Unlikely
- Shanyrak Finally Registered
- Kurmanov Arrested for Illegal Protest
- Shots Fired at Opposition Newspaper Office
- No Increase in Utility Rates

Azat Statement Prompted by Aliyev's Conviction

12. In the wake of the recent conviction of ex-Nazarbayev son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev on coup-related charges, opposition political party Azat (the former True Ak Zhol) issued a statement on March 31 demanding that all the materials in the Aliyev case be made public. The statement also demanded that law enforcement agencies be reformed to make their activities transparent; that the Sarsenbayev assassination case be reopened; that "politically motivated" convictions against Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, Mukhtar Ablyazov and other opposition politicians and journalists be reviewed; and that assets illegally taken by Aliyev be returned to their rightful owners. (www.geokz.net, March 31)

OSDP Say Government-Opposition Dialogue Unlikely

13. "A dialogue with the opposition is not likely to commence because there is no will in the government," National Social Democratic Party (OSDP) vice chairman Amirzhan Kosanov stated at a meeting of the Politon discussion club in Almaty on March 28. According to Kosanov, the situation is at a dead-end. The authorities have found themselves in an awkward position because the opposition is not represented in parliament and there is no forum for political dialogue between the authorities and Kazakhstani society. (Panorama, April 4)

Shanyrak Finally Registered

14. The Shanyrak public association has finally been registered by the government, Shanyrak leader Asylbek Kozhakhmetov announced at a press conference in Almaty on March 25. This was the fifth request for registration that the organization had made. Shanyrak was set up in 2007 with the aim of defending the rights of Almaty residents who are facing demolition or seizure of their homes because they

purportedly do not have legal title to their property. Besides Kozhakhmetov, who was formerly head of the unregistered Alga opposition political party, key Shanyrak activists include Kazakh nationalist Dos Koshim, Socialist Resistance movement leader Aynur Kurmanov, and attorney Yuriy Usov. Shanyrak claims that last year it organized more than 70 rallies and protest actions. (Svoboda Slova, March 27)

Kurmanov Arrested for Illegal Protest

15. On March 26, an Almaty court sentenced Socialist Resistance movement leader Aynur Kurmanov to 10-days in jail for organizing an illegal protest. The court levied fines against two other defendants. The illegal rally was held on March 25 in front of the Almaty mayor's office by Almaty residents complaining about the meager compensation a private company had agreed to pay them for the homes they had been forced to vacate so that the commercial buildings can be constructed on their property. The protestors demanded the annulment of the Almaty mayor's February 21, 2006 degree "On Seizure (Buying Out) of Land Plots for State Needs." They contended that the decree contradicts the constitution. No one from the mayor's office came out to meet with the protestors. (Kazakhstan Today news agency, March 25; Human Rights Bureau Bulletin, March 26)

Shots Fired at Opposition Newspaper Office

16. Two shots were allegedly fired at the window of the editorial office of the opposition newspaper Taszhargan. Editor Yermurat Bapi said he found bullet holes on March 31, but was uncertain as to when

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the incident occurred. Bapi claimed that the shots were a warning aimed at intimidating the paper's editorial staff, since Taszhargan recently published a lot of materials about the corruption of high-level government officials. Bapi alleged that the newspaper has recently been receiving strange telephone calls, while recent issues of the paper have been bought up in mass purchases (i.e., with the aim of preventing individuals from buying single copies at newsstands). The police are investigating the shooting incident. Bapi said the police had already found a bullet fired from a handgun. (Interfax, April 1)

No Increase in Utility Rates

17. During April there will be no increase in utility rates, Agency for Regulating Natural Monopolies deputy chairman Murat Ospanov said at a press conference in Almaty on March 31. According to Ospanov, over the last three months, utilities filed 80 applications with the Agency requesting permission to increase rates. None were approved, and the Agency decided instead to lower rates in 14 cases. (Express K daily, April 1)

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